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SUBJECT: RAMADAN IN INDONESIA -- AMID FASTING AND  
RESTRICTIONS ON ENTERTAINMENT, A FESTIVE AIR

¶1. SUMMARY: Indonesia's over 200 million Muslims are observing the month of Ramadan in festive fashion with a constant round of Iftaar (breaking fast) events. Per local government orders, night clubs, massage parlors and saunas are shut, while karaoke and live music venues are maintaining limited hours of operation. Local officials have been more forceful this year than in the past in pressing for closures. Non-Muslim areas of this very diverse country are not imposing bans. There have been no reports of the sort of Islamic extremist vigilante activity that happened in the past. Mission is hosting a series of Iftaars in honor of the season. END SUMMARY.

FASTING--AND BREAKING FAST

¶2. The sounds, sights and smells of Iftaars (breaking fast events) fill Jakarta each evening as families and friends gather to break their Ramadan fast. (Note: Ramadan began on August 21 and ends on September 19. Ramadan is followed by the Idul Fitri holiday.) The vast majority of Indonesia's over 200 million Muslims fast from dawn to dusk in accordance with the five pillars of Islam. Despite the hardship of fasting in a hot, humid climate and the closure of many restaurants during the day, the anticipation and preparation for countless Iftaars (or "Buka Puasa" in Bahasa Indonesia) creates a festive atmosphere. In addition to the Iftaars, many Indonesians gather before dawn to enjoy a communal meal with friends and family.

¶3. The Ambassador and DCM are hosting a series of Iftaars in honor of the season. Mission has also publicized the President's Ramadan message.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IMPOSE RESTRICTIONS

¶4. For the Ramadan timeframe, local governments have imposed restrictions on entertainment-related activities. Jakarta officials, for example, have ordered the closure of over 1,000 entertainment venues such as night clubs, massage parlors and saunas while karaoke and live music venues have limited hours of operation. (Note: Five-star hotels are exempt from the ban.)

¶5. Local officials generally have been more forceful than in year's past in pressing for the closures. Punishments for violating the closure orders range from warnings to revocation of business licenses. Officials have reported that more and more businesses are voluntarily complying and violations are on the decrease. In 2008, only 11 businesses violated Jakarta bylaws versus 37 in 2005. Although most provinces maintain similar regulations, non-Muslim majority areas do not impose bans or force closures.

¶6. Analysts estimate that the entertainment industry will

experience a 60 percent drop in revenue for the month of Ramadan as compared to other months. We have been told that the number of Japanese and Korean tourists has plummeted due to the restrictions. Economic hardship can be particularly burdensome in the more religiously conservative provinces that maintain stringent bans. That said, in a nod to economic realities, local government and religious leaders in South Tangerang District of conservative Banten Province near Jakarta have announced that they would not force entertainment venues to close because of the financial hardships that would be incurred by workers.

17. Although overall inflation in Indonesia has remained relatively low this year, the demand for food staples has caused a slight increase in prices thus far. Muslims, in a celebratory mood, tend to spend heavily during the month of Ramadan, particularly through eating, drinking and gift giving during their many Iftaar and other activities.

#### NO VIGILANTE ACTIVITIES REPORTED SO FAR

18. In the recent past, a number of hardline Muslim vigilante groups have taken the law into their own hands and engaged in illegal "sweeping" raids of entertainment venues during Ramadan. Peaking in 2005, these raids have been on a steady decline, with only occasional flare-ups throughout the country since then. To date, there have been no reports of vigilante violence so far. Despite the calm, extremists are still a presence in Indonesia and government officials remain alert.

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